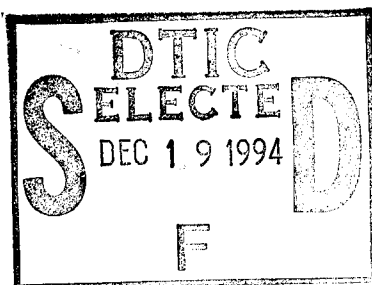


Peasant Resistance to Collectivization in the
Western Oblast, 1929-1937



by

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of History.

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Glossary

batrak/batraki - peasant(s) without any land

bedniak/bedniaki - poor peasant(s)

dvor - peasant household

edinolichnik/edinolichniki - non-collectivized peasant(s)

khutor - an independent farm completely separate from the village

khutorianin/khutoriani - peasant(s) who successfully exploited the Stolypin Agrarian Reforms and established his home on the same land he cultivated

kolkhoz/kolkhozy - collective farm(s)

kolkhoznik/kolkhozniki - member(s) of a kolkhoz

Komsomol - Young Communist League

komsomolets/komsomoltsy - member(s) of the Young Communist League

kulak - rich peasant, term was liberally applied to any peasant who opposed collectivization

lishentsy - disenfranchised individuals, usually due to previous counterrevolutionary activity

mir - village commune, also obshchina

NKVD - Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del, People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, name of the state secret police from 1934 until after the Second World War

Obkom - Oblast Communist Party Committee

oblast/oblasti - large administrative territory or region(s)

obshchina - village commune, also mir

OGPU - Obedinennoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie, Unified State Political Administration, political police, predecessor to the NKVD

okrug - administrative district, larger than a raion and smaller than an oblast

otkhod - off farm work for wages

otrub - peasant farmer whose home remained within the confines of the village

prodrazverstka - system of forced grain requisitioning used during the Civil War

Raikom/Raikomy - Raion Communist Party Committee(s)

raion/raiony - administrative division smaller than an oblast

samogon - homemade vodka, moonshine

sel'sovet - rural soviet, an administrative organ that usually supervised an area encompassing several kolkhozy

seredniak/seredniaki - middle peasant(s)

smychka - alliance between the peasantry and proletariat

sovkhoz/sovkhozy - state farm(s)

Stakhanovite - title given to peasants and workers for exceeding production quotas

starosta - village elder

trudoden' - labor day, unit of payment for kolkhoz work based on time involved and difficulty of the job

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Russian words and names are transliterated in accordance with the Library of Congress system except in cases where an alternative spelling is well established (e.g. Trotsky not Trotskii).

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

From 1929 to 1937 the Soviet government conducted a campaign to collectivize agriculture within the Soviet Union that resulted in the formation of over two hundred thousand collective farms encompassing ninety-three percent of peasant households.¹ In an effort to transform village communes into socialist communities, the government replaced traditional rural social structures, such as the mir (peasant land commune, also obshchina) and starosta (village elder) with state organs, for example the kolkhoz (collective farm) and kolkhoz chairman, forever altering life for the Soviet peasant.

As we know from James C. Scott's studies of peasant behavior, among the most explosive and inciting elements of change for peasants are those that alter conventional values and social structures or deprive the peasants of what little security they have.² Before collectivization, the hierarchy among Russian peasants had stressed the relative security of social rank as opposed to income alone. Land holding and

¹ Victor P. Danilov, "Collectivization as It Was," Social Sciences 20, no. 3 (fall 1989): 242.

² James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 242.

the relationship to the means of production determined social status rather than income. On the basis of this principle, smallholder, tenant, and wage laborers ranked in descending order. Scott found that peasants did not consider a wealthy tenant as prosperous as a marginal smallholder primarily because the latter had ownership of the means of production.³ In the Western Oblast (an oblast is a large administrative district, see maps on pp. 77-78), (today the region is divided among five oblasti: Smolensk, Briansk, Kalinin, Kirov, and Pskov), peasants felt the intrusion of the state during collectivization through the loss of land that provided them the very root of their existence. As the state tried to deprive them of their livelihood, the peasants resorted to numerous forms of resistance to hinder the plans of the Soviet government and to return to their traditional way of life.

Topic and Scope

This paper examines how peasants in the Western Oblast resisted collectivization during the years 1929 to 1937, and how their strategies evolved to combat the changing nature of the Soviet state. Violence typified peasant opposition to state policies, at a time when state policies were most violent, in the early years of collectivization from 1929 to 1934. Arson, banditry, and attacks against government

³ James C. Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 35-36.

representatives posed a significant threat to state survival by creating lawlessness and undermining government authority in rural Russia. Nonetheless, by the end of 1937 the state succeeded in establishing a minimally functional and stable collective farm system. In this study, I argue that during the years 1935 to 1937, in contrast to the violent opposition of the earlier years of collectivization, the peasants resorted to more cunning forms of protest and clever manipulation of the political discourse available to them. This change in strategy resulted from the peasants' realization that the collective farm had become a permanent fixture of rural life and that, while open opposition was pointless, "everyday forms of resistance," to borrow Scott's phrase, could lead to what was, in their view, the least unacceptable structure for the kolkhoz.

Collectivization, a broad topic, is beyond the scope of this study. The efforts of the peasantry of the Western Oblast to resist and mitigate the effect of government policies are the focus of this paper. Thus, the local party organization, relations between Moscow and the locale, and the state of urban-rural relations are mentioned only insofar as they further illustrate how peasants resisted change. Likewise, although reports used in this study originate from several subdistricts of the large Western Oblast, it is perhaps too much to say that they are representative of the entire district. Additional study is needed to show how representative my findings are.

The physical quality of the documents in the Smolensk Archive, about which more is said later, presents still other difficulties.⁴ Some were written on mere scraps of paper, many in difficult-to-decipher handwriting. Other records were microfilmed poorly and appear out of focus or unreadable, due to the poor quality of paper and ink used. Because of these technical difficulties and other constraints, I was able to examine only a small fraction of the documents available. Most of my documentation comes from eighteen files representing, perhaps, fifteen percent of the files on collectivization and three percent of the total archive.⁵ Nonetheless, since this sampling spans a thirteen year period and individual documents originate from a variety of sources, I suspect they are representative of the archive as a whole.⁶

⁴ Miscellaneous Russian Records: The Smolensk Archive. Washington: The National Archives and Records Service. Future references to the archive will contain the file (WKP number) and page number. When no page number exists only the file number is provided.

⁵ Given the organizational difficulties of the Smolensk Archive, this is truly a "guesstimate."

⁶ Nellie Ohr argues that the German army "undoubtedly did select files that cast the worst light on the system." There is no concrete evidence of this, and furthermore no reason to believe that the files represent anything less than a cross section of files available at the time of capture. See Ohr, "Collective Farms and Russian Peasant Society, 1933-1937: The Stabilization of the Kolkhoz Order" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1991), pp. 12-13.

Methodology

Scott provides an especially useful framework for an analysis of the Russian peasantry. In observing Southeast Asian peasant cultures, he argues that peasant societies employ a variety of tools to thwart the efforts of those seeking to "extract labor, food, taxes, and rents from them." Scott contends that peasants seldom engage in open rebellion against the state or landlord because of the latter's enormous advantages in weaponry and organization. The peasants, therefore, must resort to "foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, etc."⁷ Unpopular government policies and programs are "nibbled to extinction" through this endless and almost imperceptible resistance.⁸ While individual acts of resistance do not themselves pose a threat to the system, they constantly test the limits of state tolerance.⁹ This thesis defines resistance as all measures, both passive and active, taken to resist or mitigate the effects of government policies.

Justification

Several factors made the Western Oblast, located approximately four hundred kilometers west of Moscow, a suitable subject for this study. Until recently, most

⁷ Scott, Weapons of the Weak, p. xvi.

⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

⁹ Ibid., p. 255.

Western studies of collectivization in the Soviet Union concentrated on politics and decision making at the national level because the lack of sources made regional studies difficult to carry out. This broad focus often diminished the role of the peasantry, which constituted the overwhelming majority of the Russian population. Additionally, regional studies can help determine the effectiveness of central government policies and their impact on the rural populace. Finally, few Western studies encompass the entire period of collectivization. Most scholarly research examines the first phase of "total" collectivization (sploshnaia kollektivizatsiia) in the spring of 1930 or the crop failure in 1932 and the resulting famine. Therefore, my study seeks to fill a gap in the literature on peasant society from 1929 to 1937 by scrutinizing the changing nature of peasant resistance to collectivization in one region.

Sources

The abundance of source materials also makes the Western Oblast a viable topic of study. This paper draws on unpublished materials from Soviet archives, published document collections, and a variety of secondary sources. One source available to Western historians for over thirty years is the Smolensk Archive. Smolensk, the provincial capital of the Western Oblast, held the regional party archives until the German army captured them during the

Second World War. The documents fell into American hands at the end of the war. Merle Fainsod, a political scientist at Harvard University who died in 1973, was the only scholar until recently to exploit this rich collection.¹⁰

To be sure, using the Smolensk archive presents many advantages and disadvantages. The graphic depiction the documents offer of rural Soviet life and the relationship between state and peasant stand out as one of the strong benefits of using the archive. However, the political bias inherent in the documents, which reflect the party's view of life in the province, often weakens the validity of the material.¹¹ The archive itself consists of more than 500 files containing over 200,000 documents. Some files are organized by year, others by topic, and still others appear to have no organizing theme whatsoever; a single file may contain information relating to multiple topics that span several years. Likewise, some topics, such as crime in 1934 or collectivization in Roslavl'skii raion (an administrative division smaller than an oblast) in 1930-31, received greater coverage than others. A guide to the archive exists, but proves woefully inadequate for finding specific information.¹²

¹⁰ Merle Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule (New York: The RAND Corporation, 1958).

¹¹ See J. Arch Getty's "Guide to the Smolensk Archive," in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Lynne Viola, eds., A Researcher's Guide to Sources on Soviet Social History in the 1930s (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), pp. 84-96.

¹² Guide to the Records of The Smolensk Oblast of the

The use of published statistics and document collections entails many of the same difficulties as with the Smolensk archive. A document series published in the 1960s and 1970s by the Main Archival Administration of the Soviet Union is an excellent source of primary materials. Prior to the publication of this series, population and agricultural statistics--some of which were incomplete or falsified--were the only primary materials on collectivization available in the Soviet Union.¹³ Each volume of the series mentioned above contains newspaper extracts, letters from peasants and rural party officials, and local party records. However, these collections represent only a small percentage of the available documents still contained in Russian archives, leading one to question the bias of the selection process.

The release of preliminary data from the 1937 census adds significantly to the amount of statistical data for the period.¹⁴ The Soviet government originally suppressed this

All-Union Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1917-1941, Robert Wolfe and Daniel R. Brower, eds., (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1980). This guide cross indexes general topics--such as agriculture, intelligentsia, and crime--and files where information is located. However, since many files contain several hundred pages, finding specific information remains difficult, to say the least.

¹³ See Lynne Viola's "Guide to Document Series on Collectivization," in Fitzpatrick, A Researcher's Guide, pp. 105-31. With some variations, most volumes appear under the title Kollektivizatsiia sel'skogo khoziaistva v ... (1927-1937gg.).

¹⁴ Iu. A. Poliakov, et al., eds. Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1937 g.: Kratkie itogi (Moskva: Institut

document, calling it a product of "wreckers" because it placed the Soviet Union's population as much as twenty million below the expected total.¹⁵ The low figures reflect the catastrophic losses from collectivization, famine, and internal exile to labor camps. The government repeated the census in 1939. Nellie Ohr argues that Stalin may have influenced the results of the 1939 census by announcing target population figures before the census was actually tabulated.¹⁶ Although publication of the 1937 census replaces the questionable data of the 1939 census, heretofore the only demographic source available to scholars, researchers looking for more than the very basic data must still wait for the release of the complete census report.

Historiography

Western scholars have probed deeply into the early years of collectivization.¹⁷ Some Western historians, such

istorii SSSR, 1991).

¹⁵ See S. G. Wheatcroft's "Statistical Sources for the Study of Soviet Social History in the Prewar Period," in Fitzpatrick, A Researcher's Guide, pp. 153-75.

¹⁶ Ohr, "Collective Farms," p. 13 and Sheila Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 325.

¹⁷ See for example Robert Conquest, The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); R. W. Davies, The Socialist Offensive: The Collectivization of Agriculture, 1929-1939 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) and The Soviet Collective Farm, 1929-1930 (Cambridge: Harvard University

as Robert Conquest, argue collectivization was an attempt to wipe out political opposition and nationalist sentiments by deporting and starving to death millions of Soviet citizens. Others, such as Moshe Lewin and R. W. Davies, insist that economic considerations and international tensions lay at the root of collectivization, and that Stalin believed that without collectivization rapid industrialization was impossible. Whatever the argument for the causes of collectivization, these studies usually end in early 1930, after the first wave of collectivization, or shortly after the bad harvest and famine in 1932 and 1933.

The standard Soviet interpretation of collectivization first appeared in the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course. It describes collectivization as a "revolution . . . accomplished from above, on the initiative of the state, and directly supported from below by the millions of peasants, who were fighting to throw off kulak (rich peasant, term was liberally applied to any peasant who opposed collectivization) bondage and to live in freedom in the collective farms."¹⁸ Stalin's claim that poor and middle

Press, 1980); Moshe Lewin, Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968); and Lynne Viola, The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Central Committee of the CPSU (B). History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course (New York: International Publishers, 1939), p. 305. Emphasis is in the original.

peasants flocked to the kolkhozy belied the truth of the coercive and violent measures used to force peasants into the collectives.

The de-Stalinization campaign, begun at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, encouraged scholars to reexamine the history of collectivization. Research in the late 1950s and early 1960s revealed the scope of human suffering brought on by collectivization. Viktor Petrovich Danilov and other "revisionist" historians took advantage of the "thaw" in the post-Stalin era to produce a two-volume history of collectivization. Unfortunately, the state never sanctioned its publication due to its "slandorous" character. While state censors allowed historians to comment on "excesses" committed by over-zealous party activists, they did not permit historians to debate the correctness of collectivization as a policy. This state of affairs did not change until the onslaught of perestroika, when Russian historians began to publish previously unavailable or unknown documents and statistics. Danilov, and others, for instance, believe that understanding collectivization is fundamental to understanding Soviet history and the fate of the peasantry.¹⁹ As could be expected, the ferment in the

¹⁹ For an excellent discussion of the views of Soviet historians in the early perestroika era see "Collectivization: Origins, Nature, and Consequences--A Roundtable Discussion," in Soviet Studies in History, vol. 29:2 (Fall 1990), pp. 9-91. See also Evel Economakis, "Soviet Interpretations of Collectivization," in Slavonic and East European Review, vol. 69:2 (April 1991), pp. 257-81.

Russian historical profession and public debate in the popular press resulted in a polyphony of voices arguing whether collectivization continued or departed from V. I. Lenin's vision of a slow and deliberate development of cooperatives in Russia, including those who reject the very policy itself.

Western secondary sources on collectivization and rural Russia in the post-famine period are few in comparison to the number of monographs examining the early years of collectivization. Beside Fainsod's pioneering work, Roberta Manning's study of government and politics in Belyi raion, dissertations by Mark Tauger and Nellie Ohr, as well as Sheila Fitzpatrick's recent study of the Russian peasantry stand out as the few examples of scholarly research on the topic. Manning and Tauger examine several political, social, and economic aspects of rural Russia and determine that earlier depictions of the Soviet government as totalitarian and monolithic ignored the realities of factionalism and anti-government activities in the countryside.²⁰ Both conclude that the lack of party presence in rural Russia severely hampered government efforts to establish social controls over the peasantry.

²⁰ Roberta Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside in the Stalinist Thirties: The Case of Belyi Raion in 1937" (Pittsburgh: Carl Beck Papers in Russian and Soviet History, #301, 1984) and Mark B. Tauger, "Commune to Kolkhoz: Soviet Collectivization and the Transformation of Communal Peasant Farming, 1930-1941" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1991).

Unlike Manning and Tauger, Ohr and Fitzpatrick focus their studies more concretely on the peasantry. Ohr argues that the kolkhoz system stabilized throughout the Second Five-Year Plan, from 1933 to 1937, although the peasants continued to express dissatisfaction with the system in public statements and resisted economic domination by husbanding their greatest resource, their own labor. By the end of the decade an equilibrium existed that allowed the kolkhozy to function while the peasantry maintained some vestiges of their traditional culture. Fitzpatrick found that in many ways the kolkhoz structure resembled the village commune, though the peasantry never accepted the kolkhoz as a permanent fact of life. Furthermore, competition among peasants and shifting loyalties contributed to a complex social arrangement that pitted peasants not only against the state for survival, but also against each other; the most ambitious and persistent peasants survived and even thrived under the new arrangement.²¹

This thesis, by examining the evolution of peasant resistance and how the peasantry thwarted government policies expands the conclusions of Manning and Tauger. Furthermore, only by comparison of violent and non-violent peasant resistance strategies can one understand the truly dramatic transformation and stabilization of the collective farm system discussed in Ohr's dissertation. Finally,

²¹ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, p. 314.

Fitzpatrick's study was published during the writing of this thesis; I was pleased to see that my preliminary findings on the Western Oblast largely support her conclusions on the character of peasant opposition to collectivization at the national level.

CHAPTER 2 AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN THE WESTERN OBLAST

An examination of the political developments that led the central government to adopt a course of total collectivization and of the geographic and demographic characteristics of the Western Oblast help contextualize this study and the dramatic transformation of peasant resistance strategies during the later years of collectivization. To be sure, the ethnic and geographic diversity in Russia makes it difficult, perhaps impossible, to claim any area is representative of the Soviet experience. Still, in many ways the conditions in the Western Oblast typified a non-industrial consuming region.²²

Stolypin Reforms, First World War, and Revolution

Two characteristics of peasant husbandry--periodic land redistribution and strip farming--hindered the introduction of modern agricultural methods in Russia after the emancipation in 1861. Before the Stolypin Agrarian Reforms, initiated in November 1906 and June 1910, most peasants in

²² See J. Arch Getty, Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Getty argues that scholars have implicitly accepted the Western Oblast as typical, although other regional studies are necessary to support this claim.

European Russia communally held arable land. Each family in the commune received an allotment of land based on size, number of working adults, or some other measure established by the village commune. The commune periodically redistributed the land to adjust for demographic changes in the community. Redistribution discouraged peasants from making improvements to their land because the land might pass to another family during the next redistribution.²³

Along with periodic redistribution, communes divided each field according to its fertility and distance from the village, and then allotted to each member or household a share of rows or strips. Some peasant families in the Western Oblast had more than twenty-five strips to cultivate.²⁴ Strip farming and the small size and shape of the fields made it difficult to apply modern tools and technology to farming and made necessary the continuation of labor intensive and obsolete modes of agriculture.²⁵

The tsarist government initiated the Stolypin Agrarian Reforms partly in response to peasant demands for land and partly as an attempt to create a private landowning class of peasants and thereby promote support for the tsarist regime

²³ Esther Kingston-Mann, "Peasant Communes and Economic Innovation: A Preliminary Inquiry," in Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixter, Peasant Economy, Culture and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 25.

²⁴ V. P. Danilov, Rural Russia Under the New Regime, trans. by Orlando Figes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 132.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 140-42.

throughout rural Russia.²⁶ The reforms encouraged the "strong and sober" peasants to withdraw from the village commune and consolidate their strips of land into a single holding, either khutor (an independent farm completely separate from the village) or otrub (peasant farmer whose home remained within the confines of the village). However, throughout most of the country the reforms failed to establish a peasant landowning class because oftentimes communes gave to peasants who opted to leave the commune the poorest land available, making it difficult for a family to survive on its own. But in the Western Oblast--where lakes, bogs, and forests made it difficult to consolidate large communal land holdings--forty percent of the peasants quit the communes to establish independent farms, compared with less than one percent for the nation as a whole.²⁷ Thus, in the years leading up to the February Revolution, the Stolypin Reforms and geography combined to create widely dispersed peasant farms in the Western Oblast, making it more difficult to collectivize them.

In the months following the February Revolution the peasantry began to seize the property of their landlords.

²⁶ For a discussion of the Stolypin Land Reforms see Richard Hennessy, The Agrarian Question in Russia, 1905-1917: The Inception of the Stolypin Reform (Giessen: Wilhelm Schmitz Verlag, 1977) and S. M. Dubrovskii, Stolypinskaia zemel'naia reforma (Moskva: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1963).

²⁷ Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside," p. 7. See also Danilov, Rural Russia Under the New Regime, pp. 111-12.

Members of many communes harshly attacked khutorianie (peasants who separated from the commune during the Stolypin Agrarian Reforms) believing that the separated land still belonged to the commune.²⁸ Bolshevik revolutionaries, with their slogans of "Bread, Peace, and Land," seemingly fulfilled prerevolutionary peasant dreams of land ownership and control of the means of production. Many formerly landless peasants received land, while wealthy families lost what they had acquired over the last several decades.²⁹ Although rural population declined by 1.7 percent from 1916 to 1923, the number of peasant households grew nationally by 8.5 percent.³⁰ In the Western Oblast, where peasants formed 75,000 new households by the early 1920s, the net result was a leveling of peasant society as average household size and land under cultivation per individual declined.³¹

All in all, the revolution resulted in a revival of the commune. The return to land repartition and the tendency to force independent farmers to return to the collective renewed the authority of the village commune as rural communities reverted to the patriarchal leadership style

²⁸ Figes, Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution (1917-1921) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 56-58.

²⁹ Theodore Shanin, The Awkward Class, Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society: Russia 1910-1925 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 155-56.

³⁰ Table 18 in Danilov, Rural Russia Under the New Regime, p. 213.

³¹ Shanin, The Awkward Class, pp. 153-54.

that existed before the revolution. Moreover, the village elders prevailed over the village soviet (sel'sovet) when decisions conflicted.³² Unable to understand the new Soviet laws, peasants reverted to customary law after the revolution.³³ These changes in peasant society--the increased stature of the mir and starosta and return to customary law--during the "agrarian revolution" did not signal the long sought class warfare in the countryside, but merely resulted from peasants returning to traditional methods of problem solving during a period of prolonged disruption, turmoil, and change.³⁴

At first, V. I. Lenin encouraged the independence of peasant communes and village soviets because they would help destroy any remnants of the old regime and thus deprive the "counterrevolutionaries" of support in rural Russia.³⁵ In this regard, the importance of the peasantry in the success of the revolutions of 1917 cannot be overstated. Simply put, the destruction of the old agrarian order allowed the urban revolution to succeed.³⁶

³² Ibid., pp. 165-66.

³³ William T. Shinn Jr., The Decline of the Russian Peasant Household (New York: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1987), p. 12.

³⁴ Shanin, The Awkward Class, p. 161.

³⁵ Figes, Peasant Russia, Civil War, pp. 31-32.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

Civil War and War Communism

Opposition to the revolution plunged the country into a lengthy Civil War that lasted until 1921. The combination of the First World War and Civil War devastated the Russian economy, industrial base, and the social fabric. During the Civil War the party struggled for the survival of the revolution itself and, in the spring of 1918, introduced War Communism, an economic policy that mobilized the country's resources and personnel to meet defense needs. In the urban industrial regions War Communism resulted in the nationalization of factories. In rural Russia, compulsory food deliveries to the state were the primary effect of War Communism. The state mobilized brigades of urban factory workers and sent them to requisition "surplus" grain, by force if necessary, from the villages. Unwilling to part with their grain without adequate compensation, the peasants reduced the amount of sown land, further exacerbating the shortages.³⁷

By the spring of 1921, Lenin recognized rural Russia was on the verge of rebellion, primarily because of the peasantry's resistance to the despised prodrazverstka (surplus grain requisitioning system) and War Communism. The numerous peasant uprisings that Lenin termed "far more dangerous than all the Denikins, Yudeniches, and Kolchaks put together," forced an end to War Communism.³⁸ Lenin

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 276-77.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 321. Denikin, Yudenich, and Kolchak were

proposed the New Economic Policy (NEP) as his temporary answer to the "peasant question," and in 1921, he persuaded the party leadership to adopt his plan.

New Economic Policy

NEP established a system that could be deemed a compromise between the state and peasantry. It nationalized banking, transportation, foreign trade, and heavy industry while allowing "family businesses" for all small-scale economic activities. After fulfilling state quotas, peasants could dispose of their surplus goods at the local market. Many party members called the compromise a "pact with the devil" because it encouraged the peasantry to engage in free market practices akin to capitalism. NEP strove to reestablish Russian industry quickly, focusing on replacing damaged industry and not developing new industry. This led some historians to argue that it began to lose momentum in the late 1920s.³⁹ In the Western Oblast, industry and agriculture did recover quickly under the policies of NEP. The region's emphasis on light industry and flax production had spared it much of the economic ruin

leaders of White armies during the Civil War.

³⁹ For discussions of the Russian economy under NEP see Danilov, Rural Russia Under the New Regime; Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites, eds., Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); and Paul R. Gregory, Before Command: An Economic History of Russia From Emancipation to the First Five-Year Plan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

associated with the First World War and Civil War.⁴⁰ By 1927, agricultural production reached or exceeded pre-1914 levels. The most important exception was flax production, which amounted to less than sixty percent of the prewar output.⁴¹

Scarcity of, and high prices for, consumer goods combined with low prices for farm products created a nation-wide "procurement" crisis in the winter of 1928-1929. Many peasants withheld surplus grain until better market conditions prevailed, choosing either to consume the surplus themselves, feed it to their livestock or use it to distill samogon (homemade vodka). Fear that peasant reluctance to deliver grain would interrupt the industrialization process prompted Stalin to initiate a series of "extraordinary measures" and dispatch worker brigades, reminiscent of those under War Communism, to search farms and confiscate all "surplus" grain they found. Often the "surplus" included the grain held to feed the livestock through the winter and next spring's seed for planting. The state ordered a stop to all private purchase of grain, closed markets, and set up road blocks to prevent grain traffic between villages. Increasingly the "extraordinary measures" came to resemble the prodrazverstka of the Civil War.⁴² The return of force

⁴⁰ Andrew M. Lewis, "The Impact of the New Economic Policy on the Economy of Smolensk Guberniia," (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1987), p. 72.

⁴¹ WKP 290, p. 7.

⁴² Lewin, Russian Peasants, pp. 225-26.

in state-peasant relations severed the smychka (alliance of the peasantry and proletariat), destroyed economic ties between rural and urban Russia, and violated the market policies of NEP. NEP was, in effect, doomed once the state breached the smychka.

The Western Oblast on the Eve of Collectivization

The Western Oblast covered 163,400 square kilometers (approximately the size of the American state of Georgia) with a population in 1926 of approximately six and one half million, with less than nine percent classified as urban.⁴³ Russians comprised ninety-four percent of the inhabitants, the remaining six percent were Ukrainians, Jews, Belorussians, and others.⁴⁴ According to official statistics, five percent of the peasants were kulaks, seventy percent seredniaki (middle peasants), and twenty-five percent bedniaki (poor peasants).⁴⁵ Smolensk, the provincial capital, was the only town in the oblast with a population greater than fifty thousand.⁴⁶ In 1927, almost sixty percent of the peasants were illiterate compared to a literacy rate of fifty-one percent for adults in rural

⁴³ Bol'shaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe slovarno-entsiklopedicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1926-1947), s.v. "Zapadnaia oblast'," p. 181 and WKP 290, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Bol'shaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, s.v. "Zapadnaia oblast'," p. 188.

⁴⁵ Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule, p. 238.

⁴⁶ Vsesoiuznaia perepis' 1937 g., p. 62.

Russia in the nation as a whole.⁴⁷

Nearly ninety-nine percent of the sown land in 1927 was in private hands, peasant communes or khutora (enclosed farm with farmhouse, separate from the village), while sovkhozy (state farms) and cooperatives made up the other 1.3 percent. The growing season is from 165 to 190 days long. Cool temperatures, lack of precipitation, and relatively infertile soil combined to prevent large-scale production of grain or food crops. Instead, flax--grown, spun, and processed for industrial use--and subsistence gardens for family consumption constituted the primary output of the region.⁴⁸

In his study of agriculture in the Smolensk region between 1926 and 1930, Daniel Ipson argues that as a result of failed economic and agricultural policies, the peasantry withdrew from the market, returned to subsistence farming, and sought to reestablish "its quasi-anarchist traditional social organization."⁴⁹ This meant that local officials had repeatedly failed to meet grain and flax delivery quotas to the state. Poorly staffed to supervise the peasantry, lacking training in agricultural methods, and facing the

⁴⁷ Bol'shaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, s.v. "Zapadnaia oblast'," p. 209 and Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, pp. 225-26.

⁴⁸ WKP 290, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Daniel Andrew Ipson, "The Struggle to Control Agriculture in the Smolensk Region, 1926-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Davis, 1979), p. 209 and Figes, Peasant Russia, Civil War, p. 355.

possibility of losing their party membership, officials resorted to force to extract taxes and "surplus" produce from the villages.⁵⁰ Contrary to other studies that depict collectivization as a policy decided upon and implemented by the central government, Ipson argues that, independent of the national leadership, district party committees led the assault on the peasantry.⁵¹ If nearly all sown land in the Western Oblast was private in 1927, by 1934 the percentage would drop to just over twenty-two percent.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 259.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 263.

⁵² Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule, p. 263.

CHAPTER 3 EARLY YEARS OF COLLECTIVIZATION, 1929-1934

In December 1927 at the Fifteenth Party Congress the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) adopted a program calling for the collectivization of agriculture throughout the Soviet Union. This policy did not mandate rapid collectivization, but instead called for gradual incorporation of peasants into a system of collective farms based on socialist principles. Nonetheless, these principles were violated by the turn of events triggered by the procurement crisis at the end of 1928-29. Instead of gradual collectivization, total collectivization began with the adoption of the First Five-Year Plan, and from 1929-1933 a series of campaigns took place to encourage peasants to join the collective farms "voluntarily."

The "Great Turn"

Stalin "signaled the attack" in his "The Year of the Great Turn" speech delivered at the November 1929 Central Committee plenum. Foreshadowing the description of collectivization appearing in the Short Course, Stalin proclaimed that the "seredniak has moved toward the kolkhozy."⁵³ By mid-December over ten percent of the raiony

⁵³ See "God velikogo pereloma," in Pravda 7 November 1929,

for which information was available already reported that collectivization was fifty percent complete.⁵⁴ In December, Stalin announced his plan to "eliminate the kulaks as a class."⁵⁵ Rural party officials interpreted these speeches as a call to increase the tempo of collectivization.

Voluntary measures soon gave way to force and coercion. In practice, the campaigns often included abuse of peasants by party officials, confiscation of private property, coercive measures to force peasants to join the kolkhozy, and imprisonment or deportation of those who refused. As opposition to the pace and coercive measures of collectivization grew among the peasantry and within the party itself, a renewed fear of peasant rebellion spread among party officials. Stalin signaled retreat in March 1930 with his well-known "Dizzy with Success" speech, published in Pravda (Truth), in which he not only condemned those responsible for the excesses of the campaign but also proclaimed that the forty-five percent collectivization rate represented a victory for the party.⁵⁶ The pace of

p. 2.

⁵⁴ Lewin, Russian Peasants, p. 466. Another thirty percent of raiony reported collectivization 15-30 percent complete. Lewin cautions that these figures are undoubtedly inflated. If true, this further supports the thesis that local officials felt pressure to increase the pace of collectivization.

⁵⁵ Lewin argues in Russian Peasants (p. 252) that when Stalin and his close associates used the term "kulak," they were referring to peasants in general.

⁵⁶ See "Golovokruzhenie ot uspekhov," in Pravda, 2 March 1930, p. 1.

collectivization intermittently accelerated and decelerated over the next decade until 1938, when only seven percent of the Soviet Union's agriculture remained uncollectivized.⁵⁷

Collectivization, Dekulakization and Famine

Documents from the Smolensk Archive provide detailed descriptions of the problems confronting local officials during the second wave of total collectivization in Roslavl'skii raion at the end of 1930 and early 1931. Raukhman, a local party official in Roslavl'skii raion, reported that in contrast to the excesses mentioned in Stalin's "Dizzy From Success" speech, the "bulk of the countryside is willing and fully prepared to join the kolkhozy, to reject kulak agitators and their parasitic ravings."⁵⁸ Officials, worried about retribution for "mistakes" made in the earlier collectivization campaign, strove to depict activities in their district as proper and according to the party line. Since 70 percent of the peasants in the Western Oblast were seredniaki, Raukhman's report was nearly identical to the optimism displayed in Stalin's "Year of the Great Turn" speech.

In October 1930, less than thirteen percent of peasant households in Roslavl'skii raion belonged to kolkhozy. A mere four months later, collectivized households numbered 6,739 or sixty percent.⁵⁹ This increase in the pace of

⁵⁷ Danilov, "Collectivization as It Was," p. 242.

⁵⁸ WKP 159, Raukhman, p. 1.

"restructuring agriculture" represented a "confident step toward collectivization and liquidation of the kulaks as a class." The campaign involved "not only party officials, komsomoltsy (members of the Komsomol, or Communist Youth League), and local soviets . . . but also bedniaki, seredniaki, and edinolichniki (independent peasants) convinced that collectivization is the only correct path."⁶⁰

Raukhman's enthusiasm could not conceal the hardships confronting local officials. Difficulty organizing the peasants and apathy among young peasants continued to plague officials. As late as February 1931, the Kirilovskii village soviet had created "not a single kolkhoz, not a single kolkhoznik (member of a kolkhoz)" because peasants followed a "40 year old, sturdy seredniak," who refused to join a kolkhoz. After activists convinced this de facto leader that it was worthwhile to join the kolkhoz, the other peasants joined as well.⁶¹ Late in organizing, this kolkhoz was unprepared for the spring sowing campaign. Activists launched an "intensive five-day campaign" to prepare the kolkhoz for the upcoming season, while Komsomol members inventoried grain reserves, confiscated and repaired farm tools, and insured the kolkhoz proceeded according to production plans.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., Graph entitled "Rost kolkhozov v Roslavl'skom raione" in Raukhman (no page number).

⁶⁰ Ibid., Raukhman, p. 1.

⁶¹ Ibid., Raukhman, p. 2.

Raukhman's final comments underscore the difficulty facing the party in organizing young people. Sixteen months after beginning total collectivization only 38 of 255 kolkhozy had Komsomol organizations. Less than half of the new members in the last quarter came from collective farms. Reality remained far from the party goal of a "Komsomol cell on every kolkhoz."⁶³

This document on collectivization illustrates how local officials understood the peasants' refusal to join the kolkhoz. For example, Raukhman complained that various groups of "kulaks" and their lackeys (podpevaly) under the direction of lishentsy (disenfranchised individuals, usually because of previous "counterrevolutionary" activity) opposed efforts to create the collective farms. One peasant who refused to join the kolkhoz claimed that his son, a Communist living in the Donbass, said to wait because "Stalin will become dizzy with success again," suggesting that peasants expected Stalin to moderate the pace of collectivization as he did in March 1930. Furthermore, the son wrote that "war was coming and kolkhozniki will be the first to be hanged." Another peasant asked, "What is the rush? Spring is a long time away, and for now, there are no kolkhozy to live on."⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid., Raukhman, pp. 2-3.

⁶³ Ibid., Raukhman, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Raukhman, p. 4.

As we shall see, peasants, like those above, who resisted collectivization risked being labeled a kulak. The Soviet bureaucracy divided the kulaks into three groups.⁶⁵ The first and most dangerous category consisted of the "counterrevolutionary aktiv" (activists). Members of this group faced execution or imprisonment and loss of all personal possessions. Their families were exiled to remote regions of Siberia, the Urals and Kazakhstan. The "remaining elements of the kulak aktiv" who opposed collectivization composed the second category. Although the state permitted them to keep some personal property, it still sent them into internal exile. The kulaks still "loyal to Soviet power" made up the last category. These families lost most of their possessions but did not get sent into exile.⁶⁶ Instead, local officials banished them to "eroded land, swamps, wasteland, and bushy areas" where "there are no homes or structures of any kind."⁶⁷

Shanin argues that all Soviet rural policies were based on the assumption that the "peasantry would break down into new rural classes typical of capitalist society."⁶⁸ Instead of erupting into "class warfare," villages pulled together

⁶⁵ See Lynne Viola, "The Campaign to Eliminate the Kulaks as a Class, Winter 1929-1930: A Reevaluation of the Legislation," in Slavic Review vol. 45:3 (fall 1986), pp. 503-24.

⁶⁶ Davies, The Socialist Offensive, pp. 235-36.

⁶⁷ Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule, p. 245.

⁶⁸ Shanin, The Awkward Class, pp. 1-2.

to protect "that which is rightfully ours."⁶⁹ Peasant bonds of kinship and patronage prompted many villages to shield wealthy peasants from Soviet authorities, saying "we have no kulaks here," or "there are no kulaks in our village."⁷⁰ As the campaign to "liquidate the kulak class" gained momentum, local officials constantly revised lists of target kulaks, eventually including thieves, teachers, and former tsarist officials.⁷¹ Detailed information for 1930-31 reveals that, nationally, authorities sentenced almost 400,000 families, approximately two million people, to internal exile. Figures for the Western Oblast reveal that 7,308 families, among the lowest number in European Russia, were sent to the Urals for resisting collectivization or being "kulaks."⁷² Of those exiled from throughout the country, no fewer than 389,521 died while in the camps, and the camp population hovered around one million throughout the 1930s.⁷³ Many

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 178-79.

⁷⁰ Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule, p. 240 and WKP 223, pp. 1 and 18.

⁷¹ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, pp. 54-55.

⁷² See Table 1 in V. N. Zemskov, "Sud'ba kulatskoi ssylki, 1930-1954 gg.," Otechestvennaia istoriia (1994:1), pp. 119-20. "Kulaks" in this case meant anyone who refused to join the kolkhoz. The state intended to collectivize the primary grain producing regions, of which the Western Oblast is not one, first and this explains the low number of exiles from this region during the first year of collectivization.

⁷³ Table 4 in Ibid., pp. 124-25. Additionally, another 627,954 individuals left the camps for "other reasons" and this figure may include other deaths not recorded. Zemskov argues that the state sent almost 4,000,000 individuals into exile from 1930 to 1940. Of those exiled, 10 percent or 390,000 died in the camps. These figures are considerably

families, perhaps as high as twenty-five percent, "self-dekulakized" or redistributed their property or killed their livestock to diminish their financial status, hoping to avoid the "kulak" label.⁷⁴ Between 1929 and 1934, for example, self-dekulakization contributed to a fifty-five percent decline in the number of horses employed in agricultural production.⁷⁵

The campaign to collectivize agriculture contributed greatly to the famine that befell the Soviet Union in 1932, which resulted from the peasantry's reduction of sown land and the destruction caused by self-dekulakization as the state increased grain requisitions. Inexperience was one factor affecting the state's ability to determine what levels of procurement quotas could be supported, as this was only the third harvest since the beginning of collectivization.⁷⁶ Whether the famine resulted from an intentional state policy aimed at suppressing nationalism among ethnic minorities, as Conquest would have us believe, or from a combination of low harvests and an unyielding drive toward industrialization, as Tauger argues, is not important for our purposes here.⁷⁷ In either case, the

lower than Conquest's, who argued that 13,000,000 were deported and 3,000,000 died while in internal exile. Numbers alone cannot describe the toll in human suffering, as even the low estimates reflect tragedy beyond understanding.

⁷⁴ Conquest, Harvest of Sorrow, p. 126.

⁷⁵ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, p. 136.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 70-74.

peasantry blamed the Soviet government as procurement brigades took from the kolkhozy "all the grain they had, including so-called seed funds."⁷⁸ While figures for the Western Oblast are unavailable, Michael Ellman recently proposed a figure of between 7.2-8.1 million deaths nationally resulting from famine in 1933 alone.⁷⁹

PEASANT RESISTANCE TO STATE POLICIES

Peasants reacted negatively, if not always violently, to collectivization. In numerous letters to the editor of the local Smolensk newspaper Nasha derevniia (Our Village) peasants expressed their opinions about the new policy.⁸⁰ One letter asked "who among us wishes to be an eternal slave, no one of course," and that as long as "you find yourself under someone else's control, you're already a slave."⁸¹ Another peasant asked the editor if it was compulsory to join the kolkhozy, and then answered his own question, responding "I think not."⁸² This peasant, as well

⁷⁷ Conquest, Harvest of Sorrow, and Mark B. Tauger, "The Harvest of 1932 and the Famine of 1933," Slavic Review, vol. 50:1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 70-89.

⁷⁸ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, pp. 69 and 74.

⁷⁹ Michael Ellman, "A Note on the Number of 1933 Famine Victims," Soviet Studies 43:2 (1991), pp. 275-79.

⁸⁰ See Danilov, "Collectivization as it Was," p. 231. Danilov argues that Stalin and Kalinin received as many as 90,000 letters from peasants protesting the policies of collectivization.

⁸¹ WKP 261, p. 79.

⁸² Ibid., p. 82.

as others, questioned how local officials interpreted legislation and provided their own understanding of new policies.⁸³ Still another questioned the validity of an editorial that proclaimed the peasantry supported the kolkhozy:

Comrade, you wrote that all middle and poor peasants voluntarily join the kolkhozy, but this is not true. For example, in our village, Podbuzhe, not all gladly join the kolkhoz. During the registration period only twenty-five percent signed up to join the kolkhoz, while seventy-five percent chose not to.⁸⁴

Another peasant wrote to the editor "It is not possible to collectivize the population in five years, perhaps not in less than twenty years, when all the peasants can consciously and voluntarily join the kolkhozy. Right now all peasants see this as the destruction of their households."⁸⁵ This peasant, like many others who understood the significance the party placed on class divisions in rural Russia, insisted that he was "a poor peasant" in the hopes he would not be seen as a kulak or kulak sympathizer.

Peasants expressed hostility to the state's violent campaign to collectivize agriculture by spreading rumors about the scope and conditions of collectivization and life

⁸³ For other mention of the Russian peasantry's tradition of misinterpreting legislation see Daniel Field, Rebels in the Name of the Tsar (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976) and David Moon, Russian Peasants and Tsarist Legislation on the Eve of Reform (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1992).

⁸⁴ WKP 261, p. 88.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

on the kolkhoz, claiming for example that "in the kolkhozy you will lose your family, and receive a beggar's allotment of food."⁸⁶ Similarly, a report from the Western Oblast court and procurator in July 1931 states that kulaks spread rumors that, "kolkhozniki dwell in hunger, work without pay . . . in Moscow Oblast they leave the kolkhozy, and no one stops them, soon there will be war . . . already soldiers are on the Polish front."⁸⁷ Officials in Velikolutskiĭ okrug (an administrative district, larger than a raion and smaller than an oblast) reported that one rumor claimed that "when war comes, all Communists and kolkhozniki will be moved elsewhere."⁸⁸ While seldom a cause for direct rebellion, rumors reflected the ever increasing "hopelessness and desperation" of the Russian peasants.⁸⁹

A comparison of opposition activity in the oblast before and during collectivization illustrates just how violent peasant resistance had become. Various raion Communist party committees (Raikomy) forwarded court and procuracy reports, secret police files, and information bulletins to the Oblast Communist Party Committee (Obkom)

⁸⁶ D. I. Budaev, et al., eds. Kollektivizatsiia sel'skogo khoziaistva v Zapadnom raione RSFSR (1927-1937 gg.) (Smolensk: Arkhivnye otdely, gos. i partiinye arkhivy Smolenskoi i Brianskoi oblastei, 1968), p. 256.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 386-87.

⁸⁸ WKP 434, p. 214.

⁸⁹ Lynne Viola, "The Peasant Nightmare: Visions of the Apocalypse in the Soviet Countryside," Journal of Modern History, vol. 62 (December 1990), p. 767.

that made their way into the archive. According to the Roslavl raion assistant procurator's report for 1924, which summarized criminal activity in his district for the first six months of the year, the most common crimes were committed against property.⁹⁰ The assistant procurator classified only one crime as "counterrevolutionary" during this period. The relative calm of the countryside, both politically and economically, may indicate that NEP established an uneasy alliance between the peasantry and the state. But the tranquillity would not last; as the pace of collectivization accelerated so did the use of violence to express dissatisfaction with government policies, as we shall see.

ATTACKS ON GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Attacks on government officials, open rebellion (which the regime called "banditry"), and arson were the most common forms of violent peasant protest in the early years of collectivization. Each monthly report of the Oblast Department of Criminal Investigation for the period from October 1929 through January 1930 addresses the rise in violence.⁹¹ The director of the department wrote that banditry and terror against public officials characterized crime in December 1929.⁹² An information bulletin published

⁹⁰ WKP 282, no page number and Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule, p. 174-76.

⁹¹ WKP 525, pp. 1-88.

by the oblast court reveals that violent opposition to government policies continued unchecked in the first half of 1931 as various groups of "kulaks and their agents," independent peasants, and other counterrevolutionaries acted to thwart government efforts to organize kolkhozy.⁹³ The same document reported seventy terrorist attacks including murder, assault, and arson for the six-week period from 15 April to 1 June 1931.

Many newspaper articles--such as one claiming a priest, monk, and deacon murdered a kolkhoz organizer--documented the alarming rise in the number of assaults against local officials, brigade leaders, and agitators beginning in 1929 and lasting through at least 1934.⁹⁴ In one case, the kolkhoznik Lukashev admitted killing his brigade leader during an argument. Investigators found that the brigade leader repeatedly accused Lukashev of loafing and Lukashev killed him for this.⁹⁵ In another case a edinolichnik and his spouse murdered a young member of the Komsomol whom the peasant brought home for dinner. After killing her with an ax, the edinolichnik robbed her, dismembered her body, and disposed of the pieces in a nearby river. Both the husband and wife were arrested.⁹⁶ In Pochevskii raion, nine

⁹² Ibid., p. 63.

⁹³ Budaev, Kollektivizatsiia, pp. 386-88.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 245.

⁹⁵ WKP 351. p. 39.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

peasants killed Krepochenko, a director of the village soviet, and injured his brother. Authorities captured six of the nine assailants. All were "kulak agents or descendants of kulaks and rich peasants."⁹⁷ Of course, not all attacks ended in murder. In Diatkovskii raion, "kulak agents" attacked and injured Comrade Novikov, who was there to assist them with the spring sowing.⁹⁸ State sponsored campaigns against religion sometimes incited the peasants to rebellion. For example, in Briansk, 300-400 peasants attacked a group of Komsomol activists and forced them to stop taking bells from the village church.⁹⁹

During the first six months of 1931, attacks on activists and officials involved in collectivization accounted for over forty-two percent of the terrorist acts in the Western Oblast compared to thirty-five percent for the Soviet Union as a whole.¹⁰⁰ This higher rate of attacks against officials probably stems from the greater amount of independent farming in the Western Oblast. Kolkhoz membership in the Western Oblast declined from 41.2 percent to 7.8 percent from March 1930 to January 1931, compared to a decline from 57.2 percent to 25.9 percent for the Soviet

⁹⁷ Budaev, Kollektivizatsiia, p. 388.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 388.

⁹⁹ WKP 261, p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ See table in V. P. Danilov and N. A. Ivnitskii, eds., Dokumenty svidetel'stvuiut: Iz istorii derevni nakanune i v khode kollektivizatsii, 1927-1932 gg. (Moskva: Politizdat, 1989), p. 491.

Union during the same period.¹⁰¹ Though the number of attacks on Soviet officials appears to have decreased by 1934, government officials still reported five murders of party activists from 16 January to 14 May of that year.¹⁰² Through 1934, and possibly beyond, the archive indicates the life of a rural party activist was potentially in danger.

Peasants Outside the Kolkhoz System

Despite government repression many peasants refused to join the kolkhozy. For example, in Belyi raion almost half of the peasants lived outside the kolkhozy in early 1934.¹⁰³ Local authorities and agriculture activists surveyed the edinolichniki to ascertain why they refused to move to the kolkhozy. After interviewing almost all the raion's edinolichniki, local authorities analyzed their responses and classified them into five groups. The first group included peasants who displayed a generally negative attitude to the kolkhoz system. A typical response to the party's question of why the peasants refused to move to the kolkhoz was, "I hate this system, it's serfdom." The second group of peasants expressed a desire to maintain their independence and private property: "I wish to be in charge and not to submit to others" or "now that the violence has

¹⁰¹ Table 17 in Davies, The Socialist Offensive, pp. 442-43.

¹⁰² WKP 351, pp. 1-150.

¹⁰³ Manning, "Government in the Countryside," p. 24.

disappeared, for the time being I wish to remain independent." The party labeled the third group of peasants "reactionaries who had left the kolkhozy." These peasants claimed that they tried the kolkhoz, but disliked life there. Although officials distinguished between these first three categories, all of their answers reflect a negative attitude about kolkhoz life and the kolkhoz system. The fourth category shared a common doubt about their ability to provide for themselves or their families. Some peasants in the fourth category had large families, but lacked able-bodied workers, and feared they could not support themselves on the kolkhoz pay system, a situation that may have contributed to theft of kolkhoz property (which will be discussed later). Others feared their lack of education would allow others to take advantage of them. These peasants expressed neither support nor opposition for the kolkhoz system. The final grouping expressed "support" for collectivization but delayed joining the collective farm for a variety of reasons, such as they had already planted their fields or "I myself am not opposed, but my wife is."¹⁰⁴ Unlike peasants in the first three categories who criticized the kolkhoz system itself, these peasants were careful to explain that forces beyond their control prevented them from joining the kolkhoz, a strategy aimed at avoiding the "kulak" label for opposing collectivization. Peasants who expressed a dislike of kolkhoz life often had good reason,

¹⁰⁴ WKP 313, p. 57.

as conditions on the kolkhozy certainly played as large a role as the desire to maintain independence in the decision of edinolichniki to remain separate.

Despite the continued hostility on the part of some peasants to the kolkhoz system, the archival documents make reference to "successful" kolkhozy. Officials in Belyi raion classified eighteen of the twenty-nine kolkhozy as successful in 1934.¹⁰⁵ The kolkhoz Putevaia Zvezda (Guiding Star) was an example of a strong kolkhoz:

This kolkhoz, established in 1928, was a weak one until 1932. Everything about it was weak. Poor leadership was responsible for this weakness. The situation improved in 1932 after the arrival of a new director....He [the director] implemented exemplary organization of labor; all work is now done according to exact calculation, according to plan....

The kolkhoz is adequately mechanized, and has a twenty-five horsepower steam engine, which works alongside a mill, thresher, flax brake, seven mowers, four reapers, and two seeding machines....

Last year members received 2.4 kilograms of grain per trudoden' (labor day). Nowadays the assumption is that all will receive five kilograms [per labor day].¹⁰⁶

Thus, the local party organization considered strong leadership an essential element of a successful kolkhoz. Leaders organized and supervised kolkhoz members to insure they completed their work properly. An active leadership also mobilized political activity, including education and

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 60-61. The trudoden' or labor day was an elaborate system of labor accounting that assigned a value to each labor task on the kolkhoz depending on difficulty and skilled involved in completing the task. At the end of the year, peasants received a payment according to the number of accumulated "work days."

publishing of the local paper to inform peasants of the benefits of socialist life. Finally, the kolkhoz possessed the raw materials of land, livestock, able-bodied workers, and machinery necessary to succeed. The emphasis on leadership is not coincidental here as it plays an important role in reports of weak collective farms as well, such as this description of the kolkhoz Put' Lenina (Lenin's Way):

This kolkhoz was organized in 1930 from the hired laborers of the kulaks Gloubevi and others....

There were twenty households in the kolkhoz, more than half of which were batraki (peasants without land). In the years 1930-31 poor management controlled the kolkhoz....

At the end of 1932 and the beginning of 1933 this kolkhoz was combined with another. In all there were fifty-eight households in four settlements spread over five to six kilometers....Twenty-five to thirty percent of the fertile land in the kolkhoz lies fallow....

As a result of incompetent directors, there is a criminal element inside the kolkhoz. The insufficient direction from the village soviet and Raikom allowed this element not only to exist but to penetrate the leadership as well....Losses and incompetence are common....¹⁰⁷

This evaluation attributed production losses to mismanagement. Investigators blamed the kolkhoz leadership for the failure of this farm, and ignored the fact that before joining the kolkhoz over half of the residents had no land of their own, and were therefore unaccustomed to farming or managing their own affairs. The party could not blame the peasants for the farm's failure. To do so would further exacerbate peasant animosity to the state; nor could it admit the system was to blame. Therefore, failure became

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

the fault of individual leaders. Under these circumstances only a leader of extraordinary talents could reorganize and successfully operate this kolkhoz. The conditions depicted on it contrasted sharply with the descriptions of its enthusiastic beginnings, when one peasant wrote in a letter to the raion executive committee, "Long live the kolkhoz Lenin's Way, Long live Soviet Power."¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, independence carried significant financial costs. A comparison of the incomes and expenses of four families, two independent and two kolkhoz, demonstrates the unfavorable tax burdens placed on the edinolichniki to "persuade" them to join the kolkhozy. Each of the families harvested roughly equal amounts of grain, except barley and oats. Nevertheless, the amount available to the independent family after paying taxes, setting aside next year's seed and fodder for the livestock was 75 percent as much rye, 15 percent as many oats, and 37 percent as much barley as the kolkhoz family.¹⁰⁹ Further analysis reveals the favorable tax and market advantages afforded the kolkhoz family. The independent family's total pre-tax income was 80 percent as much as the kolkhoz family. However, after all taxes and obligatory payments, the disposable income of the kolkhoz family was four times greater than the independent family.¹¹⁰ Results of a comparison of two upper

¹⁰⁸ Budaev, Kollektivizatsiia, p. 268.

¹⁰⁹ WKP 313, p. 58. Table "Dokhody i raskhody--natural'nye."

income families, though neither was considered a kulak, are much the same. Higher payments to the state in produce and taxes, often over 700 percent higher, left the independent family a disposable income that was 40 percent less than the kolkhoz family.¹¹¹

Local officials concluded that almost all peasants would "benefit" from joining a kolkhoz. And, indeed, the state's manipulation of taxes and compulsory grain deliveries impoverished many edinolichniki, leaving them little recourse but to join a kolkhoz. Documents in the archive reveal that in the first six months of 1934, 898 independent peasant families joined collective farms in Belyi raion. Regrettably, they do not tell how many edinolichniki remained.¹¹²

BANDITRY

Many independent peasants turned to outright rebellion, which party officials called banditry, to express their dissatisfaction with Soviet policies. Similar to the bandit groups known as the Green movement that operated during the Civil War, roving "bands of hooligans" waylaid individuals and requisition brigades and deprived them of money,

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Table "Dokhody i raskhody--denezhnye," p. 58.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Table "Dokhody i raskhody--denezhnye," p. 59. Davies found that in 1929, sharply different from this report, the state exacted almost four times as much grain and produce from collective farmers as edinolichniki.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 62.

produce, and personal possessions.¹¹³ Collective farms, in general, were the most common target for banditry, as one in ten kolkhozy in the Western Oblast reported bandit attacks in 1931.¹¹⁴ Bandits stole grain and livestock, robbed houses and kolkhozniks, and burned barns on collective farms. While bandit gangs did not limit their activity to kolkhozy, as more and more peasants joined the collective farms, it is understandable that the official statistics would reflect an increasing rate of attacks against collective farms. Manning argues that the absence of a permanent police presence and the general weakness of government authority contributed to the rebirth of banditry in rural Russia.¹¹⁵

A report from the Oblast Department of Criminal Investigation in October 1929 noted a decline in banditry in September and praised the efforts of local authorities in Rzhhevskii okrug who "created a detachment [to combat banditry] and are taking active measures to liquidate the bandits."¹¹⁶ It is more likely that the necessities of the harvest season, as opposed to government efforts, caused the

¹¹³ For a discussion of banditry during the Civil War see Figes, Peasant Russia, Civil War, pp. 316-20.

¹¹⁴ See table in Danilov, Dokumenty svidetel'stvuiut, p. 491.

¹¹⁵ Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside," p. 33. Figes argued in Peasant Russia, Civil War, pp. 340-41, that bandit groups known as Greens posed a similar threat to state control during the Civil War.

¹¹⁶ WKP 525, p. 26.

decline in banditry. Supporting that conclusion is a "noticeable growth in banditry, especially...in Rzhevskii okrug" just two months later, and after the harvest season.¹¹⁷

Officials classified most bandits as "class aliens," and believed that kulaks and their sympathizers were using banditry in the political struggle against Soviet power.¹¹⁸ One report for October 1934 lists thirty-three individuals arrested for banditry, including two kulaks, nine edinolichniki, three kolkhozniki, and nineteen "déclassé" types.¹¹⁹ Local officials arrested one bandit gang of eight members on 16 January 1934. In the preceding month this group committed thirteen armed robberies and stole "money, clothes, and other things" from their victims, one of whom was shot in the leg.¹²⁰ Another bandit group apprehended in January 1934 included the secretary of a Komsomol cell. Among other crimes, this group stole kolkhoz horses, and suffocated a peasant woman, Irina Vasilevoi, by placing a bag over her head. This band carried one revolver, three hunting rifles, and knives.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

¹¹⁸ Danilov, Dokumenty svidetel'stvuiut, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ WKP 351, p. 140. "Déclassé" probably refers to escaped or previous criminals, members of religious groups, etc.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 5.

The crime spree peaked in June 1934 with seventy-five cases of armed robbery, many involving assault or murder.¹²² Banditry became so widespread that oblast officials enlisted the militia to combat the gangs. Fainsod argued that the bandits were successful in avoiding capture until 1934 because they operated with the approval and assistance of village soviet leaders.¹²³ In October, due in large part to the efforts of oblast officials and the militia, the incidence of banditry declined to twelve robberies. Unable to battle effectively against the better armed and organized militia, most bands were captured or dissolved themselves. Unlike the campaign to eliminate banditry in 1929, after this years harvest there was no resurgence in bandit activity, and by November only one group of bandits remained at large.¹²⁴

ARSON

While murder, assault, and open rebellion caused the government the greatest concern, arson posed a more immediate threat to the peasantry because it was easy for a small fire to spread quickly and eventually destroy an entire village. The archive suggests that deliberate arson had become a common problem between 1929 and 1934, because the phenomenon did not even warrant mention in the 1924

¹²² Ibid., pp. 66-73.

¹²³ Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule, p. 198.

¹²⁴ WKP 351, p. 140.

procurator's report. Peasants destroyed their property rather than give it to the state or in order to decrease their economic status in hopes of avoiding the "kulak" label. In other cases, arsonists targeted local officials or activists involved in grain collection campaigns or collectivization.¹²⁵ For example, "kulaks and their lackeys" set fire to the house of Comrade Kuzmichev, director of the Kozel'skom village soviet.¹²⁶

Arson often resulted in the complete destruction of a kolkhoz's harvest and loss of its livestock. In one such case a fire destroyed the kolkhoz's farm machinery and nearly two hundred poods (one pood equals thirty-six pounds) of grain. Raion administrators reported that six "hostile kulaks" were arrested for setting the fire.¹²⁷ In another incident, an elderly man set fire to the kolkhoz stable and the ensuing blaze killed forty-two horses and destroyed the entire grain reserves. After setting the fire, the man returned to his home and committed suicide by hanging.¹²⁸ Contributing to the devastating effects of arson was a general lack of preparedness of local officials to fight fires. An inventory of 60 kolkhozy in 1933 revealed that there were only 18 fire engines, 22 buckets, and 102 hooks (used for pulling down burning structures) available in case

¹²⁵ Davies, The Socialist Offensive, p. 87.

¹²⁶ Budaev, Kollektivizatsiia, p. 387.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 276.

¹²⁸ WKP 351, pp. 42 and 64.

fire should arise.¹²⁹

In 1931, arson accounted for slightly less than twenty percent of the terrorist acts in the Western Oblast, compared to nearly twenty-two percent for the whole of the Soviet Union.¹³⁰ Fainsod argued that by 1934 arson was on the decline and that most kolkhoz fires resulted from "negligence and carelessness."¹³¹ It is understandable that peasants would seek other means of protest, especially after they had joined the kolkhoz, because arson threatened the survival of the kolkhoz through the long winter by destroying grain reserves, draft animals, and next year's seed for planting.

A final note on crime and crime reports further illustrates the complexities of the peasant-state relationship. Almost without exception the reports indicate that suspects were "kulaks" or their "agents or lackeys," had a family history of "counterrevolutionary" behavior, or came from a family of landed gentry under the tsarist regime.¹³² The following entry typifies the language used in crime reports:

On 21 February [1934] at 7:00 in the evening a fire destroyed a woodshed and fodder worth 5000 rubles on the kolkhoz "Proletariat." The OGPU (political police) and the secretary of the militia established that the fire was the work of the following group:

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

¹³⁰ See table in Danilov, Dokumenty svidetel'stvuiut, p. 491.

¹³¹ Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule, p. 199.

¹³² Budaev, Kollektivizatsiia, p. 387.

1. Zamogaev - former Cossack policeman.
2. Zamogaev's nephew and kolkhoz business manager.
3. Stasevich - former nobleman and kolkhoznik.
4. Iakoblevich - former kulak.
5. Savchenko - middle peasant and edinolichnik.

This group has been involved in anti-kolkhoz work and hounding the kolkhoz chairperson.¹³³

The report portrays those accused of antisocial behavior as deviants. In some respects that was true, for while social discontent was widespread and deeply rooted, few peasants chose violence to express opposition. It remained important for the party to maintain an image of support in the countryside. To do otherwise would bring into question the readiness of the peasantry, still ninety percent of the population, for socialism.

Conclusions

Conditions in the Western Oblast reflected events in other regions of the Soviet Union.¹³⁴ Attacks on government officials, banditry, and arson posed a great threat to the survival of the Soviet state. The government lacked the resources and personnel necessary to make its presence felt everywhere. Instead it relied on "campaign" tactics whereby

¹³³ WKP 351, p. 40.

¹³⁴ See V. P. Danilov, ed., Ocherki istorii kollektivizatsii sel'skogo khoziaistva v soiuznykh respublikakh (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi Literatury, 1963), pp. 38-39. For example, terrorism increased by four hundred percent in the Ukraine from 1927 to 1929. Similarly, officials in Ostrogozhskii okrug reported 226 assassinations of activists, 234 attempted assassinations, and 762 cases of arson.

urban cadres visited rural communities during critical periods--such as sowing, harvesting, and procurement seasons--or during times of social unrest, to shore up the influence of local party officials.¹³⁵ Additionally, the state employed a variety of methods to coerce the peasants into joining the collective farms, such as threat of arrest, deportation, and manipulation of taxes. As the mechanisms of state control expanded so did the likelihood of retaliation against peasants for anti-government activities. But as we shall see, the peasantry recognized the increasing coercive power of the state and adapted its resistance techniques to meet this new challenge.

¹³⁵ Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside," p. 30.

CHAPTER 4 TRANSITION TO "EVERYDAY RESISTANCE"

In the Western Oblast the transition from open rebellion to everyday resistance had as much to do with the nature of peasant society as it did with political developments. Peasant communities oftentimes employ everyday methods of resistance to mitigate the effects of government policies on daily life. These active, but nonviolent, measures can succeed when open rebellion fails because the root of the protest is ill-defined and thus unassailable.¹³⁶ Peasants develop a cautious "safety first" mentality that weighs the possible gains of open opposition against the likelihood of retribution.¹³⁷

Reasons for the Change to "Everyday Resistance"

One obstacle to open rebellion is the "day-to-day imperative of earning a living, of household survival."¹³⁸ Strict emphasis on fulfillment of procurement quotas, even during the famine in 1932-33, caused rural officials to seize all grain, including fodder and sowing reserves, from the peasants. The famine represented a breaking point in

¹³⁶ Scott, Weapons of the Weak, pp. 32-33.

¹³⁷ Scott, Moral Economy, pp. 15-17.

¹³⁸ Scott, Weapons of the Weak, p. 246.

peasant-state relations because the peasantry realized that grain for their subsistence came only after providing grain for the industrialization effort. Fitzpatrick argues that the peasants were better cared for under serfdom because, unlike life on the kolkhozy, the master ensured his workers were well-fed.¹³⁹ Thus, the emphasis and character of peasant resistance began to change.

Along with the peasantry's desire to minimize risk and ensure survival, the state played a role in the changing character of peasant resistance. The increasingly coercive nature of taxation and continued deportation of hundreds of thousands of "kulaks" to labor camps certainly made peasants fear the "kulak" label. Additionally, two political events--the Kolkhoz Charter in 1935 and the Stalin Constitution in 1936--played a large role in the transition to everyday resistance. The Kolkhoz Charter signaled for the first time that the state was willing to compromise with the peasants on the structure, organization, and operation of the kolkhozy.¹⁴⁰ The charter defined the privileges and obligations of kolkhoz membership, guaranteed social programs such as maternity leave, and established policies that allowed former kulaks to join the kolkhozy. The final draft of the charter included an important concession to the peasants: the acknowledgment that a private plot of

¹³⁹ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, pp. 74-76.

¹⁴⁰ Tauger, "Commune to Kolkhoz," p. 512. See "Primernyi ustav sel'skokhoziaistvennoi arteli" in Pravda, 18 February 1935 for the complete text of the charter.

approximately one-half hectare (depending upon the region) and ownership of some livestock (excluding horses) were necessary to insure a "decent life" for the kolkhozniki.¹⁴¹ The charter accepted the village as the base of the kolkhoz and the dvor (peasant household) as its smallest unit. The guarantee of land and reaffirmation of the importance of the village and family helped peasants retain some ties with their traditional social structures.

The Stalin Constitution, adopted in December 1936, echoed the conciliatory tone of the Kolkhoz Charter.¹⁴² On paper at least, the new constitution guaranteed an expanded list of civil and legal rights to all Soviet citizens, including peasants. Article 7 reaffirmed the right of households to cultivate a private plot of land and raise their own poultry and livestock, except horses. Article 9 permitted the existence of private enterprises. Many peasants across Russia interpreted this as an end to "dekulakization," resulting in a five percent decline in kolkhoz membership nationally.¹⁴³ Formerly dekulakized individuals took advantage of their new equality to demand a return of their confiscated property. Placing this text

¹⁴¹ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, p. 122.

¹⁴² For the text of the constitution see Bol'shaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, s.v. "Konstitutsiia SSSR" or Aryeh L. Unger, Constitutional Development in the USSR: A Guide to the Soviet Constitutions (New York: Pica Press, 1981), pp. 140-158.

¹⁴³ Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside," pp. 38-40.

into the larger historical tradition of peasants misinterpreting documents, Manning argues that the constitution undermined the authority of the central government in rural Russia because peasants were inclined to read what they wanted into the document.¹⁴⁴ Peasants exploited their image as illiterate and backward to twist the meaning of the new constitution to fit their ideals of just legislation. Finally, the state created a means by which peasants could complain of excesses and abuse. This complaint system proved beneficial to both the peasants and state.

Non-Violent Protest: Complaint Letters

Peasants in the Western Oblast used complaint letters, foot dragging, slaughter of livestock, theft, sabotage, and flight to deter government efforts to control their daily lives. The government partially encouraged two types of resistance--complaint letters and flight. Complaint letters to party officials as a common form of social protest constitute one of the most valuable categories of documents contained in the Smolensk Archive. These letters highlight common problems in rural areas, reflect peasant opinions on changing policies, show increased participation in politics to mitigate or improve local conditions, and reveal how peasants manipulated government-held stereotypes of their culture.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, these letters represent one of

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

the only sources of peasant sentiments formulated in their own voice.

That peasants felt free to sign letters directly addressed to government officials illustrates that the state condoned and in many cases encouraged the peasants to exercise this right of petition. Stalin's "Concluding Speech" delivered at the February Plenum in 1937 supports this argument. He stated:

There is still another kind of verification, the check-up from below, in which the masses, the subordinates, verify the leaders, pointing out their mistakes, and showing the way to correct them. This kind of verification is one of the most effective methods of checking on people.¹⁴⁶

Fainsod argued that the government cultivated the right of petition to keep tabs on local officials and stay abreast of the peasant mood, in effect using the "Soviet citizenry to spy on one another."¹⁴⁷ Manning determined that the party saturation rate for Belyi raion was one Communist for every 283 residents, results that partially support such a conclusion. Since over half of the party members and candidates lived in the city, the party saturation rate in the villages likely dropped to a much lower percentage.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Ohr, "Collective Farms," pp. 105-6.

¹⁴⁶ Stalin quoted in Getty, Origins of the Great Purges, p. 146.

¹⁴⁷ Fainsod, Smolensk Under Soviet Rule, p. 378 and Ohr, "Collective Farms," p. 175.

¹⁴⁸ Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside," pp. 8-11.

This traditional "top down" interpretation of denunciations and complaint letters construes them as a tool of state control and explains why the state would encourage the peasantry to exercise their right of petition. Conversely, as many different reasons for complaints existed as did motives. Fitzpatrick argues peasants used complaint channels to settle old scores, manipulate the system, advance personal causes, or to disparage political rivals.¹⁴⁹

Some peasants asked government officials to intervene in family matters such as domestic violence or failure to provide adequate support by the husband.¹⁵⁰ Others complained that they were refused a permit to seek work in a factory (otkhod), that they were mistreated by officials, or that some other economic injustice had befallen them. One letter to the Obkom complained that the local director of the village soviet illegally combined three kolkhozy into one. After members voted against the consolidation, Kutashenkov, the village soviet director, "made an unacceptable visit to members of the kolkhoz and, like a kulak trick, frightened members into incorrectly signing a protocol of the meeting." The writer appeals to the "higher organization to look into the situation" and "presently, members of all three kolkhozy are disturbed by the improper consolidation." Sixteen kolkhozniki signed the letter.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, p. 255.

¹⁵⁰ Ohr, "Collective Farms," pp. 122-23.

Almost one-third of the complaints addressed to the Oblast Executive Committee in the first half of 1935 concerned unfair delivery assessments, fines imposed by a village soviet, or improper conduct by local officials.¹⁵² One letter from a member of the kolkhoz Vpered (Forward!) asked for help in delivering the kolkhozniki from the "clumsy and malicious economic sabotage of the [village soviet] director." Among other complaints, Khristina Smirnova, a member of the kolkhoz board of directors, alleged that the director discouraged criticism (kritika) and self-criticism (samokritika) and improperly selected his own sister for a much sought after course for tractor operators.¹⁵³ Another letter protested the light punishment received by another peasant who "engaged in economic sabotage and was the son of a former kulak."¹⁵⁴

One peasant named Durasov appealed to the raikom secretary for help after the local newspaper Za kollektivizatsiu (For Collectivization) printed an article claiming he was the son of a man executed for

¹⁵¹ WKP 201, pp. 210-11. The letter in the archive bears no signatures, but is annotated at the bottom that sixteen signatures were on the original. Many peasant letters in the archive are typewritten, possibly because party functionaries transcribed them before forwarding them to officials.

¹⁵² Ohr, "Collective Farms," p. 119.

¹⁵³ WKP 203, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵⁴ WKP 190, p. 153.

counterrevolutionary activities. Though lengthy, this passage is revealing:

I, Durasov, appealed to Bolshunov, secretary of the Gzhatsk Raikom for help in correcting this error....The author of the article [in the newspaper] does not know my biography....Comrade Bolshunov said the author [of the article] was correct when he said that I do not exemplify the Soviet spirit. I cannot accept such an answer....Therefore, I decided to ask the Obkom to investigate this business....I was born in 1899....to a family of middle peasants, my father until 1922 spent all his time at various factories. In 1922 he moved back to the village and in 1924 died in the hospital. I worked in the village until 1915 and moved to Moscow where I worked in a factory....From 1928 until now I have worked in a cooperative. No one in my family was ever executed. Neither my family, parents, nor I were ever disenfranchised....

Therefore again I ask you to investigate this incidence, that has insulted me to the depths of my soul.¹⁵⁵

The investigation revealed that the man executed was not Durasov's father, but the report further states:

D. N. Durasov comes from a peasant family....Before the revolution and after, his parents were prosperous, his mother worked, and his father employed hired hands on his land and used seasonal labor in field work. During the period of collectivization you self-liquidated your property. During the period of the Gzhatsk Kulak uprising, your Uncle Mikhail, a former kulak, and Uncles Nikolai and Matvei, profiteers, participated in the counterrevolutionary revolt....All were shot by a detachment of Red Guards....The father of the accused...was not executed by the Red Guards.¹⁵⁶

The file on this case closes at this point and does not reveal the repercussions for Durasov or his family. Although partially exonerated of the charges, his position

¹⁵⁵ WKP 195, pp. 65-72.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

in the party remained in jeopardy and he held some responsibility for the "anti-social behavior" of his relatives. Again, as in the case of criminal activity, lineage factored as an important element in judging one's loyalty to the state.¹⁵⁷

To shift the blame away from themselves for any remarks that might be misconstrued, peasants repeatedly apologized for their crude writing style, established their humble economic status, and professed loyalty to the party or Stalin: "Excuse me for the bad letter. I am semiliterate" or "I am the *bedniak* Artemovskoi."¹⁵⁸ To gain the support of one agency over another, peasants sometimes included a list of contacts made with other officials who had failed to resolve their problems. In Smirnova's letter above, she concluded by stating that she had made the raion director aware of her complaints, but he had yet to solve them.¹⁵⁹ A peasant could insure quick attention to a complaint by routing it through the editor of the local newspaper. Editors forwarded complaints to appropriate officials, usually with a request that the official report the outcome of the investigation. One peasant wrote the editors of Krestianskaia gazeta (Peasant Newspaper) to complain that

¹⁵⁷ Fitzpatrick argues that the Bolsheviks often used a "genealogical" approach to class in the early 1920s. See Fitzpatrick, "The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society," in Fitzpatrick, Russia in the Era of NEP, pp. 12-33.

¹⁵⁸ WKP 197, p. 77 and Budaev, Kollektivizatsiia, p. 104.

¹⁵⁹ WKP 203, p. 18.

the deputy chairperson of the kolkhoz Novyi put' (The New Way) closed the nursery without any explanation. Workers stayed home because they had no one to watch their children. The editors asked the raikom secretary to investigate the situation and inform them of the results.¹⁶⁰ Peasants, aware of the campaign in 1936-37 to eliminate the "insensitive attitude toward toilers' complaints," hoped that using an editor of a newspaper as an intermediary would place additional pressure on local authorities to investigate their complaints.¹⁶¹

It is difficult to judge the success of peasant complaints because official responses are not always found with the initial letter. The archive contains a few hundred letters, of which I examined approximately one hundred.¹⁶² Thus, it is difficult to determine how representative the letters were of the peasantry's mood. Furthermore, the archive may contain only letters that interested government officials and were therefore more likely to receive attention. However, it is clear that some letter campaigns led to the dismissal of local officials, as in this NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs or secret police) report of a kolkhoz chairperson accused of abusing the peasants:

Volkov flew into a rage and began, right on the street, to beat Smolov....In the middle of May he beat

¹⁶⁰ WKP 190, p. 152.

¹⁶¹ Ohr, "Collective Farms," pp. 131-32.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 107.

the kolkhoznik Kuprin because the latter tore some newspaper which Volkov was saving to roll a cigarette....All these hooligan actions occurred while he was drunk.¹⁶³

Higher authorities removed and expelled the chairperson of the kolkhoz from the party. On a larger scale, Manning argues that complaint letters resulted in new policies that limited the authority of local officials to confiscate peasant property to pay for tax arrears.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, in Belyi raion, peasants successfully demanded the removal of nineteen kolkhoz chairpersons and five village soviet chairpersons, among others, as late as 1937.¹⁶⁵ Such consequences of peasant complaints kept the rural administration in constant turmoil.

The letters provided the party leadership with a great deal of information about the living conditions on the kolkhozy. In contrast to the letters of the early years of collectivization (see Chapter 3), peasants were careful to avoid questioning the efficacy of state policies. Instead, they focused their criticisms on over-zealous officials, abusive activists, and other "enemies of the revolution." Many letters bear the initials and handwritten notes of senior oblast officials, indicating that the contents of peasant complaints reached the upper levels of the local party bureaucracy.¹⁶⁶ While it is difficult to gauge the

¹⁶³ WKP 195, p. 51-56.

¹⁶⁴ Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside," p. 35.

¹⁶⁵ Manning, unpublished manuscript, cited in Ohr, "Collective Farms," pp. 117-18.

importance of peasant letters, it is clear that local officials knew that a channel of communication existed between the peasantry and higher officials, and through this channel, the central government monitored their daily activities.

Flight to the Cities

The government also gave some approval to another common tactic of the peasants--flight, or more accurately, relocation to the cities. Before collectivization, the government estimated that rural Russia had a surplus labor pool of between eight and nineteen million individuals.¹⁶⁷ The government needed this ready supply of laborers to become the work force in urban factories. One in four peasants eligible to join the kolkhozy moved instead to cities in search of factory jobs.¹⁶⁸ Although the state tolerated and even somewhat encouraged the exodus, the enormity of relocation overwhelmed urban social and support structures. In the Western Oblast the total population decreased by 6.4 percent from 1926 to 1937 while the urban population increased by almost 60 percent. By 1937 the two largest cities in the Western Oblast, Smolensk and Briansk, had nearly doubled in size during the previous decade.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ WKP 196, pp. 56, 57, 60, 72 among others.

¹⁶⁷ Douglas R. Weiner, "'Razmychka?' Urban Unemployment and Peasant In-migration as Sources of Social Conflict" in Fitzpatrick, Russia in the Era of NEP, p. 148.

¹⁶⁸ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, pp. 80-81.

The exodus from the Soviet countryside, both voluntary and involuntary, reached its peak in the early 1930s.¹⁷⁰ Rural officials argued that the unrestricted flow of peasants from the villages hampered their efforts to meet production quotas on the kolkhozy, prompting the Soviet government to initiate a system of internal passports in 1933 that limited peasant mobility. Nonetheless, as the flow of peasants to the cities continued to number over a million per year from 1935 to 1937, agricultural productivity in 1937 (figured in centners per hectare, a centner equals 110 pounds) barely exceeded the famine year of 1932.¹⁷¹ Kolkhoz chairpersons, fearing that they could not fulfill their quotas, imposed stricter rules for work discipline and denied permission for peasants to work on otkhod, already seen as a problem from peasant letters above.

Foot Dragging

Peasants combated the efforts of kolkhoz chairpersons to impose stricter discipline by engaging in inefficient work or "foot dragging." Peasants took advantage of absent

¹⁶⁹ Vsesoiuznaia perepis' 1937 g., pp. 48-62.

¹⁷⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Great Departure, Rural-Urban Migration in the Soviet Union, 1929-33," in William G. Rosenberg and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, eds., Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 31.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 31 and Table 28 in Budaev, Kollektivizatsiia, p. 28.

or otherwise occupied supervisors to lighten their work load or stop work altogether. Peasants arrived in the fields early in the morning, yet often waited until the brigade leader arrived, sometimes several hours later, before beginning the day's work.¹⁷² One investigation by the Oblast Control Commission commented that "not one individual in the kolkhoz Krasnyi Oktiabr' (Red October) dairy knew his daily assignment" even though work plans for the ten-day period existed at the village soviet and brigade leader levels.¹⁷³ An examination of kolkhoz expense reports for the mid-1930s reveals that as many as twenty percent of all kolkhozniki earned less than fifty work days per year.¹⁷⁴ One peasant youth was overheard saying, "Only fools like to work, I do as little as I can."¹⁷⁵ Independent peasants refused to accept additional land allotments, and the associated hike in grain quotas, as a protest of the procurement system.¹⁷⁶

Somewhat akin to "foot dragging" was the peasants' emphasis on cultivating their private plots instead of kolkhoz lands. Peasants diverted supplies destined for kolkhoz fields, such as seed and fertilizer, for use on their private plots.¹⁷⁷ It is difficult to overestimate the

¹⁷² Ohr, "Collective Farms," pp. 358-59.

¹⁷³ WKP 390, p. 113.

¹⁷⁴ Ohr, "Collective Farms," p. 357.

¹⁷⁵ WKP 425, p. 56.

¹⁷⁶ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, p. 154.

importance of the private plot, generally an acre in size, to the survival of the kolkhoz family. Almost all meat, dairy, eggs, and a majority of the potatoes in the peasant diet came from the plot.¹⁷⁸ Peasants put more effort into cultivating the private plot because it was more closely associated with the family's welfare.¹⁷⁹

Sabotage, Theft and "Wrecking"

The state labeled any person suspected of undermining the advancement of the revolution as a "wrecker." "Wrecking" included many activities--such as killing livestock, destruction of state machinery, theft, and arson (already discussed in Chapter 3). Killing off livestock as a resistance strategy continued from the early years of collectivization. Several factors--including poor harvest, fear of the "kulak" label, and an unwillingness to give animals to the state without compensation--influenced peasants to kill their livestock illegally. From the beginning of 1934 to the end of 1937 the number of horses in the Western Oblast declined from 444,544 to 392,019.¹⁸⁰ Crop failures in 1932 and 1936 led many kolkhozniki to destroy their horses, cows, pigs, and sheep because they

¹⁷⁷ Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside," p. 38.

¹⁷⁸ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, pp. 130-31.

¹⁷⁹ Scott, The Moral Economy, p. 14 and Shinn, Decline of the Russian Peasant Household, pp. 9-10.

¹⁸⁰ Budaev, Kollektivizatsiia, Table 33, p. 642.

lacked fodder to feed the animals. Other peasants killed their farm animals because the Soviet government used taxes, usually arbitrary and punitive in nature based on the number of animals owned, as one method of forcing independent farmers to join the kolkhozy. Unable to meet their tax obligations, many edinolichniki sold their livestock to raise money or slaughtered it to reduce their tax liabilities.¹⁸¹ The "final straw" for most independent farmers came with the imposition of a special tax in 1938 of 275-500 rubles per horse. Most edinolichniki, unable to pay the tax, abandoned their farms and joined the kolkhoz.¹⁸²

Theft was another common type of "wrecking." According to Scott, theft occurs when property rights are contested or when peasants refuse to recognize a government's claim to grain.¹⁸³ The state established the death penalty as the maximum punishment in response to the dramatic rise in theft of grain from kolkhozy and storehouses following the famine in 1932. Nonetheless, reports from 1934 show that even the threat of execution or internal exile failed to stem the occurrence of theft. As mentioned earlier, many peasants felt they could not support their family on kolkhoz wages, and as average labor day payments declined, for example in Belyi raion average labor day payments declined from 2.3 kg/day to 1.6 kg/day from 1932 to 1936, peasants continued

¹⁸¹ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, p. 155.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 158.

¹⁸³ Scott, Weapons of the Weak, pp. 265-66.

to turn to theft to supplement their income.¹⁸⁴ Local authorities were reluctant to pursue thieves actively because they, similar to their earlier support of bandit gangs, were often guilty of theft themselves.¹⁸⁵ It would appear that since kolkhoz property did not belong to any individual, many peasants felt little remorse in stealing it.¹⁸⁶

Competition Among Peasants

Peasants not only battled the state, but also each other. Violence against individual peasants, complaint letters that denounced neighbors, and kolkhoz membership itself became tools in the struggle among peasants. As seen in Chapter 3, violence among peasants was common. Attacks on activists, who in many cases were ambitious peasants, occurred frequently. Bandit attacks against kolkhozy victimized other peasants. In the late 1930s, peasants often targeted Stakhanovites (title given to peasants and workers for exceeding production quotas) for physical attacks.¹⁸⁷ Scott found that when an individual peasant violated work norms within a local community, as fellow peasants perceived the Stakhanovites, they were often subjected to abuse. N. Kovaltsev, the secretary of the

¹⁸⁴ Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside," p. 4.

¹⁸⁵ Ohr, "Collective Farms," p. 348.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 347.

¹⁸⁷ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, p. 237.

Belyi Raikom, noted that a significant fault on the kolkhoz Vpered (Forward) was an element that "persecutes the Stakhanovites" and "interferes with the Stakhanovite movement."¹⁸⁸

Peasants blocking kolkhoz admission of other peasants was another form of competition. By the late 1930s membership in a kolkhoz was advantageous compared to life as an independent peasant because of the favorable tax status, larger private plot than an edinolichnik, access to fields for grazing of livestock, and the guaranteed social programs, such as maternity leave enjoyed by kolkhozniki.¹⁸⁹ Although kolkhozniki had no legal right to deny kolkhoz membership to edinolichniki, they often did so or admitted them reluctantly because they were unwilling to accept impoverished peasants with little to contribute to the collective.¹⁹⁰

Conclusions

Peasants recognized the disadvantages associated with violent opposition to the Soviet government. Open opposition exposed an individual to punitive treatment, such as prison, internal exile, or disfranchisement. Furthermore, the state's violent and coercive tactics of the early collectivization and dekulakization campaigns had made

¹⁸⁸ WKP 385, p. 365.

¹⁸⁹ Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, pp. 113-14.

¹⁹⁰ Manning, "Government in the Soviet Countryside," p. 25.

their impression on the peasantry. Always vulnerable to retribution, peasants turned to "everyday means of protest" to combat and mitigate state policies.

Along with the peasantry's desire to avoid confrontation, two political developments contributed to a change in peasant mentality. Both the Kolkhoz Charter in 1935 and Stalin Constitution in 1936 permitted peasants to keep some links with their traditional culture. The peasants realized the kolkhoz system was a reality, but nonetheless continued to struggle against it to ease its intrusion into their lives.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

This study examines how Russian peasant society in the Western Oblast adapted to the political changes and social controls imposed upon it by the central government. Collectivization of agriculture carried with it significant costs. Millions of Russian peasants perished or were exiled from their native lands in what one Soviet historian calls "one of the most cruel and repressive periods of the Stalin's leadership."¹⁹¹ By 1937, both sides had won an incomplete victory. The state gained the stability and resources necessary to continue industrialization, but conceded that the peasants also had needs. Throughout the 1930s the central government and peasantry worked to establish what was in their view the optimum structure for the kolkhoz. This process of trial and error continually affected the size of the kolkhoz, the property rights of its members, and the administrative organization of its leadership.¹⁹² For the peasant, collectivization ended centuries-old dreams of autonomy and ownership of the land. The state, on the other hand, saw collectivization as a

¹⁹¹ Danilov, Dokumenty svidetel'stvuiut, p. 7.

¹⁹² Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants, pp. 103-4.

vital step toward the industrialization of the Soviet Union and guaranteeing security of the revolution.

In exchange for retaining some aspects of their traditional culture--such as the private plot and position of the dvor in the rural social structure--the peasants consented to central government control of previously routine decisions made at the village level. The peasants accepted the opportunity to turn from violent opposition to everyday resistance because it fit well with their "subsistence ethic." Lessons--such as the deportations of kulaks and their families, confiscation of private property, and worker brigades that routinely descended upon villages to enforce procurement quotas--impressed upon the peasantry the enormity of the coercive power of the state. Unable to overcome the traditional advantages of the state in organization and resources, peasants instead manipulated the system, inundated officials with complaints, refused to work unless supervised, etc.

This should not be interpreted to mean that the Russian peasantry was united against the central government. Ohr and Fitzpatrick correctly argue that many peasants prospered under the kolkhoz system. Peasants used physical violence, banditry, theft, and denunciations to settle old scores, disparage the reputation of rivals, and further their own personal ambitions. The social structure of rural Russia was a complex one of shifting loyalties and priorities.

The early years of collectivization characterized Stalin's leadership style of advancing goals before determining how to achieve them.¹⁹³ The mass chaos this created during the early years of collectivization decreased agricultural production and threatened industrialization. International relations and the growing threat of war in Europe made the industrialization of the Soviet Union critical to the survival of the state. To accomplish its objectives, the government had to insure a certain amount of cooperation from the peasantry, precisely at a time when state-peasant relations were at their most violent stage. The Kolkhoz Charter and Stalin Constitution granted concessions that extended the role of the peasant household as the basic structure of rural life. As Christine Worobec argues, collectivization replaced the village commune with the kolkhoz but could not eliminate the traditional household with its small animals and kitchen garden.¹⁹⁴ For the state, the concessions resulted in stabilization of the kolkhoz system.

The Soviet government, seeking to provide an outlet for peasant dissatisfaction, condoned and in some cases encouraged at least two common forms of peasant protest--complaint letters and flight to the cities. Complaint letters helped officials monitor the actions of

¹⁹³ Danilov, Dokumenty svidetel'stvuiut, p. 27.

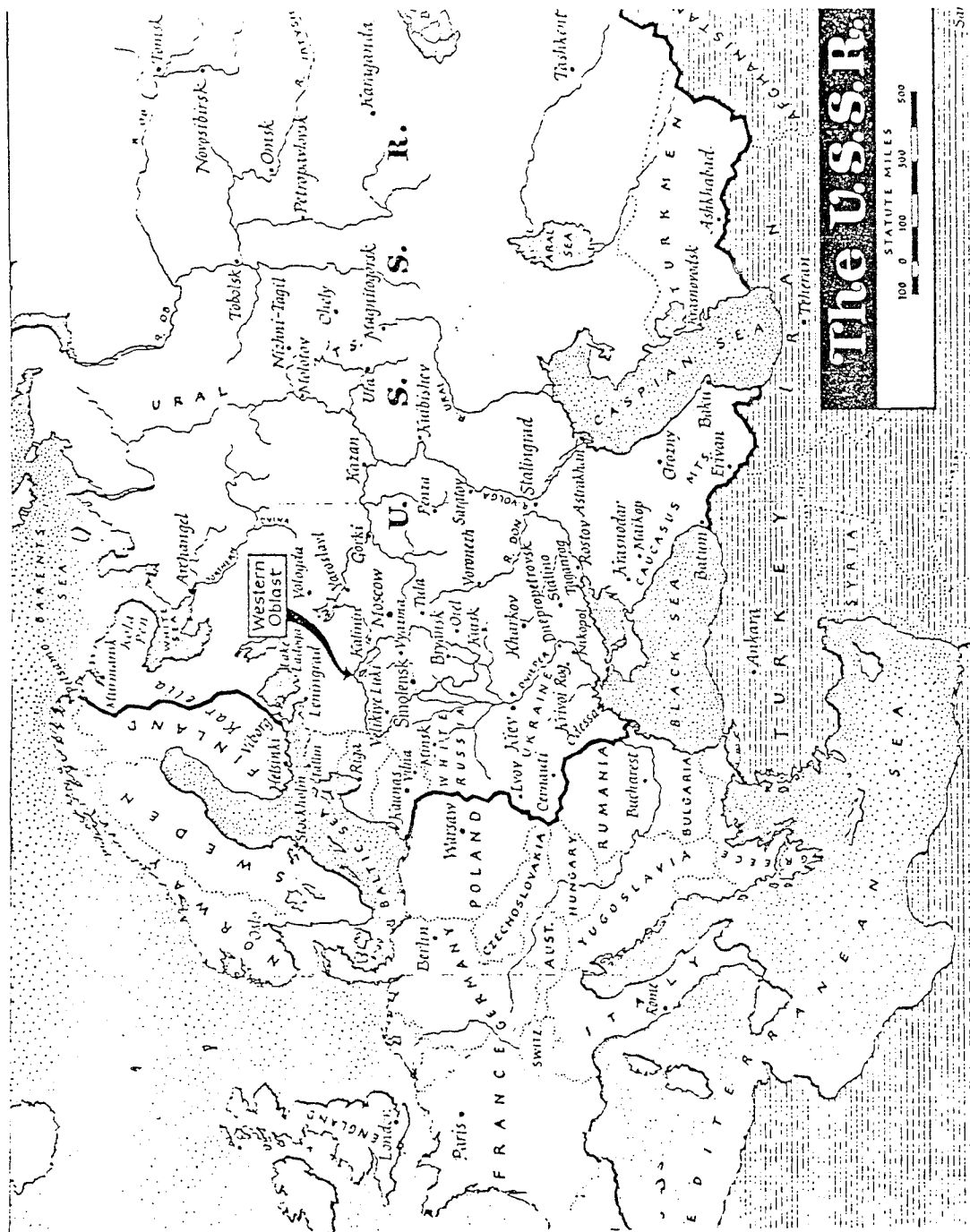
¹⁹⁴ Christine D. Worobec, Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.14.

far-flung subordinates and provided an outlet for peasant frustrations. The rural exodus more than doubled the Soviet Union's urban population, from 1926 to 1937, when the total population increased by less than twelve percent, and provided the labor pool for the mass industrialization programs of the First and Second Five-Year plans. One area in which it is less clear if the state encouraged resistance was in the farming of the private plot. Concentration of peasant labor on the private plot greatly increased production of staple goods such as eggs, poultry, and potatoes. The state encouraged peasants to sell their surplus and thus created additional tax revenues while meeting the subsistence needs of the urban population.

The conclusions put forward here support Ohr's determination that the kolkhoz system developed into a "basically stable and minimally functional" enterprise by the end of 1937. Only in comparison to the violence and lawlessness of the early 1930s can one fully appreciate the transformation that took place in less than a decade. Even with a lack of mechanization and modern technology the collective farm system met the agricultural needs of the Soviet Union during the Second World War and beyond.

Additionally, the conclusions in this paper support Tauger's and Manning's determination that lack of party presence in rural Russia severely hampered government efforts to establish social controls over the peasantry in the 1930s. From 1935 to 1937, the peasants resorted to more

cunning forms of protest and clever manipulation of the political discourse available to them. This change in strategy resulted from the peasants' realization that the collective farm had become a permanent fixture of rural life. This conclusion supports Fitzpatrick's broader analyses by providing a specific and regional examination of peasant society in the 1930s and differs only slightly from her view that the peasantry never accepted the collective farm system. Evidence here suggests that the peasants realized the kolkhoz system was permanent and pretended to support it while simultaneously working to undermine its control over their daily lives.



Source: Fainsod, Merle. Smolensk Under Soviet Rule.
 Boston: Unwin Hyman (for RAND), p. 16. Reprinted by
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WESTERN OBLAST

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS - June 1, 1932

RAION LIST

1 Sebezhsky	61 Kozelsky
2 Pustoshkinsky	62 Sukhinichsky
3 Novosokolnitsky	63 Duminiichsky
4 Loknyansky	64 Lyudinovsky
5 Kholm'sky	65 Dyatkovsky
6 Toropetsky	66 Dubrovsky
7 Leninsky	67 Kletnyansky
8 Penovsky	68 Zhukovsky
9 Ostashkovsky	69 Bryansk
10 Kamensky	70 Zhizdrinsky
11 Lukovnikovsky	71 Plokhinsky
12 Selizharovsky	72 Khvastovichsky
13 Nelidovsky	73 Karachevsky
14 Otyabr'sky	74 Shablykinsky
15 Velikolutsky	75 Brasovsky
16 Nevel'sky	76 Navlinsky
17 Usvyatsky	77 Pochepsky
18 Velizhsky	78 Mglinsky
19 Ilin'sky	79 Unech'sky
20 Belsky	80 Surazh'sky
21 Ol'mensky	81 Gordeevsky
22 Rzhevsky	82 Krasnogorsky
23 Staritsky	83 Novozybkovsky
24 Pogor-Gorodishchensky	84 Klintovsky
25 Zubtsovsky	85 Klimovsky
26 Karmansky	86 Starodub'sky
27 Sychevsky	87 Pogarsky
28 Novodugyn'sky	88 Trubshchensky
29 Kholi-Zhirkovsky	89 Pesochensky
30 Safonovsky	90 Baryatinsky
	91 Meshchovsky

Source: Fainsod, Merle. Smolensk Under Soviet Rule.

Boston: Unwin Hyman (for RAND), pp. 486-87. Reprinted by permission.

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